

Postscript: Huntresses

CHRISTINE WOZNEY

The town of Kitimat, five hundred miles north of Vancouver on the B.C. coast, lies in an area rich in history. The first white missionary, Susan Lawrence, arrived in 1873, intent on converting as many Indians as possible to Christianity. Her success led to the establishment of a permanent Methodist Mission in the Indian village, called Kitamaat.

A magazine called NaNaKwa, or "Dawn on the Northwest Coast", was published quarterly from 1889 to 1907 by the head of the Mission, Dr. Raley. NaNaKwa contains a lot of interesting information, including three short references to Indian women who were active as "huntresses".

The first excerpt, in July, 1901 issue, is entitled "The Annual Bear Hunt":

The Kitamaat Hunt commences in May, as soon as the hibernates come out from their winter quarters. The past season lasting about three weeks has been successful; ...Joseph Wilson ...[killed] twelve bears. Sarah Legaeah the huntress killed six...

The July, 1902 issue reports:

Moodseithlimie is a famous huntress. Her hunting grounds are at Kildalah, where she goes quite alone to hunt bear, seal, mink, marten and wolverine with most surprising valor.

And the May, 1907 issue states:

The huntress Sarah Legaic and Agnes Robinson on the morning of July 24th saw on the surface an unusual commotion. Taking a skiff 8 feet long they paddled to the middle of the inlet and found two seals in deadly combat.... They were fighting for the possession of a baby seal.

Besides this written information, an oral tradition exists that has been briefly explored by the Kitimat Museum. In August of 1975, the Custodian, Ms. Mendel, obtained information from Jeffrey Legaic about his aunt Sarah, who was mentioned in NaNaKwa.

These examples are not enough to completely overturn the conclusions reached by previous scholarship. However, they are enough to indicate that scholars have been missing something. Undoubtedly, women who have been active in many ways within Indian society have not always been given the recognition they deserve. More research is essential to reveal the work of all Native women and especially those in nontraditional fields so that a vital part of our history will not be lost.